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Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 23092

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, ECON, SGEN, VM, LA, SREF, CB
SUBJECT: KENNEDY STAFFDEL OBSERVATIONS ON VIETNAM

REF (A) BANGKOK 22845, (B) BANGKOK 22785

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING ARE ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM MADE BY MEMBERS OF THE KENNEDY STAFFDEL DURING VISIT AUGUST 7-9 TO BANGKOK. COMMENTS COVER GENERAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, ECONOMIC LIFE, KHMER REFUGEE CAMPS IN VIETNAM AND RELIGION. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE KENNEDY STAFFDEL VISIT TO HANOI, TINKER TOLD US THAT HE FOUND LITTLE EVIDENCE OF RECONSTRUCTION IN HANOI. THE CITY WAS QUIETER AND MORE SOMBER THAN HO CHI MINH CITY (HCM CITY). TINKER REMARKED THAT HE FOUND HCM CITY LESS CHANGED FROM THE OLD SAIGON THAN HE HAD EXPECTED. WHILE THERE WAS AN EXPECTANCY THAT THINGS WOULD GET WORSE, PEOPLE ARE STILL DRESSED COLORFULLY AND THE STREETS FULL OF TRAFFIC, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NOW MORE BICYCLES AND MOTORCYCLES THAN AUTOMOBILES. TINKER SAID THAT CHOLON (THE CHINESE
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QUARTER OF HCM CITY) WAS STILL BUSTLING, WITH LITTLE VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF THE DEPARTURE OF THE THOUSANDS OF CHINESE FROM THE CITY. MOST SHOPS SEEMED STILL OPEN, HE SAID. HE WAS ABLE TO WANDER AROUND FREELY IN BOTH THE SAIGON AND CHOLON SECTIONS OF THE CITY. GROUP SOUGHT UNSUCCESSFULLY TO VISIT A GOVERNMENT STORE WHERE RATIONED PRODUCTS WERE SOLD. THEY STAYED AT THE ICCS

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COMPOUND. MS. KAUFMAN SAID THAT SHE SAW SIGNS OF MALNUTRITION, BUT NOT STARVATION AMONG THE CHILDREN IN HCM CITY, AT AN ORPHANAGE, AND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THEY VISITED THE SAIGON HOSPITAL, OPPOSITE THE OLD CENTRAL MARKET. THEY WERE TOLD OF SERIOUS SHORTAGES OF MEDICINES AND SURGICAL EQUIPMENT. A SURGEON WHISPERED TO TINKER THAT HE HAD JUST RETURNED FROM TWO YEARS OF RE-EDUCATION CAMP, OR "BRAINWASHING."

2. THE DELEGATION HAD INITIALLY PROPOSED VISITING A NEW ECONOMIC ZONE (NEZ) IN CHAU DOC OR TAY NINH PROVINCE. INSTEAD, THEY VISITED AN NEZ IN LONG AN, WHICH TINKER DESCRIBED AS A SHOWCASE, BUT NOT A PRIME SHOWCASE. THEY SPOKE WITH THE INHABITANTS OF THE NEZ AND WERE TOLD THAT THE FIRST YEAR THE SOIL HAD BEEN POOR AND CONDITIONS DIFFICULT. NOW, THEY CLAIMED, THINGS ARE PRETTY GOOD.

3. THEY VISITED TWO KHMER REFUGEE CAMPS IN TAY NINH. THEY FOUND CONDITIONS GOOD. IN ONE, THE REFUGEES HAD ALREADY BEEN PROVIDED PLOS OF LAND FOR TEMPORARY SETTLEMENT, BRICK HOUSE, ETC., AND SEEMED ON THEIR WAY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY. THERE WAS AN INORDINATE NUMBER OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE CAMPS, MAKING ONE WONDER WHERE THE MEN WERE OR WHETHER THEY WERE KILLED IN KAMPUCHEA, TINKER COMMENTED. THE DELEGATION WAS TOLD THAT THERE WERE 330,000 REFUGEES IN VIETNAM,
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INCLUDING ALL NATIONALITIES, FROM KAMPUCHEA. AT LEAST 150,000 WERE OF KHMER STOCK.

4. ARCHBISHOP HANNAN SPOKE WITH THE CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP IN BOTH HANOI AND HCM CITY. HE FOUND THE STATE OF THE CHURCH IN NORTH VIETNAM DISCOURAGING. FOR EXAMPLE, NEITHER THEY NOR THEIR COLLEAGUES IN HCM CITY HAVE CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION FACILITIES WITH THE VATICAN. HOWEVER, BOTH HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO VISIT THE VATIC*N ONCE WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS.

5. THE ARCHBISHOP FOUND TWO TYPES OF PRIESTS IN THE SOUTH: THOSE WHO HAD CAPITULATED TO THE AIMS OF THE STATE AND THOSE WHO WERE STILL STRUGGLING TO FURTHER THE AIMS OF THE CHURCH. ALL CHURCH PROPERTY HAS BEEN CONFISCATED BY THE STATE. ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHURCH IS NOW IN THE HANDS OF THE STATE. "PRO-SRV" PRIESTS SPOKE OF HOW GOOD IT WAS FOR THE STATE TO TAKE CARE OF ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHURCH AND HOW WELL OFF THE PEOPLE WERE UNDER SOCIALISM. OTHER PRIESTS CLAIMED THAT THE CHURCH WAS STILL A VITAL PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH, LARGELY BECAUSE OF ITS WORK IN THE HOSPITALS, WHERE NUNS ARE ABLE TO TEND

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THE SICK. THE SEMINARY NEAR SAIGON IS STILL TRAINING YOUNG PRIESTS, ARCHBISHOP HANNAN WAS TOLD. HE ATTENDED MASS AT THE SAIGON BASILICA. HE WAS TOLD THAT SERVICES SRE HELD FOR OVERFLOW CROWDS, BEGINNING AT 4 A.M. ON SUNDAY MORNING AND CONTINUING THROUGHOUT THE DAY. HE WAS STRUCK BY THE LARGE NUMBER DF CHILDREN IN THE CONGREGATION. ABRAMOWITZ

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